

Hack Langstaff Oral History Interview

BRUCE PETTY: Today is Wednesday, 11 July, the year 2001. I'm in Sacramento, California. I'm interviewing Mr. Hack Langstaff. The interviewer is Bruce Petty. When you were born, what year and where?

HACK LANGSTAFF: Okay, February 2nd, 1921 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

BP: Your father was in what sort of business there?

HL: Well, my father, actually my father was born in Canada. And he grew up in Nebraska. But he was an electrical engineer. And he was chief electrical engineer for a company similar to PG&E in the Tri-State Area -- Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia. So we grew up actually in Wilkinsburg. It's a suburb of Pittsburgh. And we moved later on to a place called Mount Lebanon, which is south of Pittsburgh. And he built a new home there.

BP: Now, did you go to school, high school, graduate from high school there?

HL: Went to high school in Mount Lebanon and played football with them. In fact, I ended up with a scholarship to the University of Michigan from Mount Lebanon High School.

BP: Okay. And you graduated from college before you went into the service or no?

HL: No. It was kind of interesting. While I was in high school, a junior in high school, I decided I wanted to go to the Naval Academy. And I was talking to several people. And they said rather than wait around trying to get an appointment, join the naval reserve, and you can go in through that way. So I joined the naval reserve. And I attended a number of their training sessions down at the old post office building in Pittsburgh. And it turned out to be like a glorified Boy Scout camp-type thing. And I finally got disgusted with the thing, and I quit going to any of the training sessions. And I was up at the University of Michigan my junior year, and I received a letter from the Navy department telling me to report to Newport, Rhode Island to go through boot camp. So I wrote back and told them that I was sorry. I was going to college now, and I couldn't be bothered going into the Navy. And they wrote back and said, "You have six months to do on your contract. You will report." So then I wrote back and asked them to at least let me finish my school year, which they did. And at the end of my school year I reported to Newport, Rhode Island and started through boot camp up there.

BP: That was what year?

HL: And that was in 1941, in June of '41. And sleeping in the hammock and going through the whole routine. And halfway through that program up there at Newport, Rhode Island, I read this article on the bulletin board one day about aviation. So I sent a letter into Washington requesting an assignment to aviation. And I got a set of orders back. And I went up to this chief petty officer and told him that I was sorry I had to leave because I had a set of orders to go into Squantum, Massachusetts to take my tests and so forth for aviation. And they were quite concerned because I didn't go through channels and so forth. So they refused to let me -- release me. And they sent off to Washington a letter, the commander did. And they agreed that I had to finish my boot camp before they'd let me go into aviation. So I finished my boot camp and then went over to Squantum, Massachusetts.

BP: What was the place? Squantum?

HL: It's called -- it was a naval air station at Squantum, Massachusetts, outside of Boston.

BP: How do you spell it?

HL: It's S-Q-U-A-T-U-M, Squantum. S-Q-U-A-N-T-U-M, I guess it is. Anyway, it was up there out of Boston. I went through the whole program, and I was qualified and everything, as far as their schooling requirements. And you had to have

at least two years of college at that time to enter this naval NavCad program. So I ended up...

BP: It's called NavCad?

HL: Nav, Aviation -- naval cadet.

BP: Okay, NavCad.

HL: Naval cadet program. So I started in aviation then and went through their training there, flew the N3N. I had eight hours in that...

BP: The N3N?

HL: The N3N Stearman.

BP: Oh, Stearman.

HL: Stearman, open cockpit. Then, my solo flight, I took off and ended up in a snowstorm, which was kind of interesting. But then, from there I went on down to -- transferred down to Atlanta and held at Atlanta for a bit. And then we transferred on to Jacksonville rather than Pensacola. At that time, Jacksonville was another big naval aviation-training place. But I went down there and took my main aviation training at Jacksonville. And when I completed my training there, I had requested fighters. And fighter training at that time was down at Opa-locka Naval Air Station in Miami. And they selected 12 pilots out of each class for the Marine Corps. You had to request it. But I

was selected, and I went on and got commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps.

BP: Now, this is all before Pearl Harbor?

HL: This is all -- Pearl Harbor -- no, wait a minute. About Pearl Harbor, I was at Squantum, Massachusetts. And I completed my preliminary training there. And they gave us a week off to go home. And I went home to Pittsburgh. And I was on the train coming back to Squantum, Massachusetts from Pittsburgh. And I was on the train coming into Philadelphia. And a lady got on at Philadelphia and said, "Isn't it terrible about Pearl Harbor?" And that was December 7th that she told me about the Pearl Harbor attack. And that's where I learned we'd been attacked. So I went on, and that -- I had a stop, a layover in New York City that night. And it was like New Year's Eve in Times Square. I got off and went down to Times Square. And all the streets were just completely jammed with people watching the news go around in Times Square. And that was my initiation into the Pearl Harbor situation.

BP: Well, you said it was like New Year's Eve. I mean, it wasn't like they were celebrating, though.

HL: No, no. There were just masses of people. And they were all intent, watching the news go around on the Times Square.

BP: That was like the preferred method of getting the news as opposed to the radio?

HL: Yes, yes. In other words, it was in big, big letters going around Times Square.

BP: Now, what was that? That was a certain building. Do you remember what building that was? Was that NBC or something?

HL: I don't remember the building. But in the center of Times Square there was one building where they had news in large letters just rotating around.

BP: In lights?

HL: In lights, yes. And everybody was standing there gazing at this -- at the news as it was going around. And boy, it was -- and, of course, then security at -- I got back to the base up there, and the security was something terrific. Everybody was concerned about things. But then we were transferred on down to Atlanta. And we were held there for a period of almost a month, I guess. And we didn't do any flying there. We did a lot of ground schoolwork. And then on to Jacksonville where we started our real training.

BP: Was there some particular reason why you chose the Marine Corps over the Navy?

HL: Yes, there was. My instructor at Squantum, Massachusetts, my flight instructor, was a Marine captain by the name of

Bob Harvey, who later became a brigadier general in the Marine Corps. And well, he was a great person as far as that's concerned. But I think his uniform kind of struck me. In those days they had that -- they wore the boots, the leather boots. And they had the Sam Browne belt. And he just looked so terrific as far as...

BP: It was the uniform, eh?

HL: The Marine uniform. I think the Marine uniform attracted me, plus the fact that he seemed to be a great leader and took a great interest in me. So when I got a chance -- and the other reason that -- I heard that you had a better chance of getting in fighters if you were in the Marines. So I think that was another big pusher.

(break in audio)

BP: Okay.

HL: So now we're down in Jacksonville. And I went through there in flying colors. And when we finished there, this was in...

BP: Flying what, you said?

HL: I said I went through there with flying colors. I didn't have any problems. I never had any accidents. In fact, I flew over 7,000 hours, and I never had an accident in my flight experience, which was pretty good, I guess. But we finished up in Jacksonville in June, I guess it was, June

of 1941. And then I was sent on -- not June of '41, June of '42, June of '42. And then I was transferred to Miami, Opa-locka, to start the fighter training. And we went down. Then we flew the F3F. It was the biplane fighter aircraft, one of the first Navy fighter aircraft.

BP: F3F? What was it called, did it have a name?

HL: It was...

BP: I can look it up.

HL: It was a Grumman. I've forgotten the name of the darn thing.

BP: I can look it up.

HL: It was a great airplane. We trained in the thing, and it was -- you'd go up and get in a dogfight with it, and it had a float-type carburetor in those days. And you'd get inverted, and the engine would cut out. And you'd fly down, get it started, go up, and it would start over again. But I loved to fly that airplane. It was a great aircraft. Well, we completed our training there in 1942 in, I guess it was around September. And I was transferred to San Diego to go through carrier training. And we went there, lived on the base there at North Island in San Diego. And when I completed that, and that was in 1942, but I think it was around October, we were called in and given orders to - - well, first of all, I had completed all this carrier

training, the fighter training and so forth. And we got -- I got my set of orders to go to dive-bombers. And I went in to the commanding officer there and complained bitterly about this business, because I'd gone all through the fighter's and so forth. And they said, well, you'll have to pull somebody else's name out of the hat here to replace you, to go to the dive-bombers. So I drew a name out, and it happened to be a fellow by the name of Reinhardt Leu, who later became a colonel in the Marine Corps.

BP: L-E-W?

HL: L-E-U. L-E-U was his last name. Reinhardt Leu as kind of an odd...

BP: It sounds familiar, like I heard someone else...

HL: Yeah, he's a real famous gent. He retired as a colonel from the Marine Corps and did a great job. But I drew his name out. And he went up, and he complained bitterly. And he ended up drawing somebody else's name out. And Reiny Leu and I became the best friends and flew all during the war together. And I still -- he's back in Virginia, but I talk to him all the time. He's one of my best friends today. But we...

BP: Just to back up a second, what carrier did you qualify on?

HL: This was the -- God, I'd have to go back and look at my book, I think, because I don't recall the name of the darn carrier.

BP: Just a small point.

HL: But we flew in San Diego there and did a lot of air-to-air tactics and gunnery in the F4F. That was our first introduction to the Wildcat. And anyway, we completed that. Then, we received orders to go to Santa Barbara to join a Marine air group in Santa Barbara.

BP: Where the campus is now, eh?

HL: Yes, yes, yes. That was the Marine...

BP: I went to college at UC-Santa Barbara. And they still had some of the old barracks there. I don't know if they're still there now, but when I went there in the '60s...

HL: All three of my children graduated from there, or not that. Two of them graduated from there. The third, my daughter, went there two years. And then she -- they didn't have the course she wanted. She transferred to San Diego State.

BP: I graduated there in '71.

HL: Yep, we went up there, and this Reinhardt Leu and I went up together. They called him Chief because he was supposed to have a little Indian blood in him or something. But I bought an old 1928 Oldsmobile. I'll never forget it. And we took off from San Diego. And in those days you couldn't

get tires or anything, you know? And I think we had a couple of blowouts on the way up there in that car. But we went to -- I don't know how much of this you want me to tell.

BP: Well, we can always filter out the stuff and tighten it up.

HL: We took off from San Diego and started for Santa Barbara. We got to Los Angeles, and we went up to the Embassy Hotel. They had a -- or Ambassador Hotel. They had one of the service units there. What do you call them?

BP: USO?

HL: USO-type unit there, and primary for officers, which is kind of interesting. Well, somehow or other the lady that ran it got the idea that Chief Leu and I had just returned from Guadalcanal. And so, they took us out to the studio. And we got to observe a taking of one of the pictures -- China Girl, I think it was called, or something like that. And we got to go to lunch with the movie actors and actresses, and Victor McLaglen and Loretta Young, Paulette Goddard and all of them, all these famous movie stars at that time. And they kind of wined and dined us there and treated us like big heroes. And neither one of us ever let on that we -- I think we told them to begin with that we hadn't come from Guadalcanal. But they didn't listen. And so, they gave us the real treatment. But anyway, we went

on to Santa Barbara and checked in. We hadn't even met the squadron commander yet, or the group commander. And they issued us -- in those days, around Santa Barbara, it was kind of a red, clay-like soil. And it rained a lot and so forth. And vehicles were stuck in the mud and everything. It was pretty...

BP: Primitive?

HL: Yeah, primitive is a good word for it at that time. But they had built some barracks for us. But they issued us -- see, at that time they also had had a shelling from a submarine or something. And so, security was quite tight. But they issued us these .45 pistols right away. And Reiny Leu was a great hunter and fisherman, very great hunter. Anyway, he said, "Come on, let's go down and shoot some birds down at the beach." So we took the .45s, and we went down to the beach and started popping away at some of these seagulls.

BP: With .45s?

HL: With a .45. And we hadn't fired about two rounds, and we were surrounded by MPs. And they hauled us back up to the commanding officer. And that's how we met our commanding officer, as being in trouble. And he just took a look at us and shook his head. But his name was Jim Neefus.

BP: Neefus?

HL: Neefus, N-E-E-F-U-S, Jim Neefus. It was Jim Neefus, who had been on Midway. And he was a great gent. And he just took us in and gave us the word. And he didn't reprimand. Well, he reprimanded us. But he didn't penalize us at all. And we eventually were assigned to his squadron. And then we started our training, and we had the F4F. But then the Corsair was assigned. And we were one of the first squadrons to ever receive the Corsair.

BP: Now, the story I get about the Corsair was that the Navy didn't want it, so they gave it to the Marines.

HL: That's exactly right. What had happened was the landing gear was so long, the oleo struts on the Corsair had to be very extensive to clear the prop, the 14-foot diameter prop. So they found that on the carrier, well, with those long legs for landing gear, it tended to bounce quite a bit. And they had trouble with it bouncing over the hooks, the hook bouncing over the cables.

BP: Oh, the arresting gear, eh?

HL: The arresting gear, right. So the Marines got the Corsair, and it was a big man's airplane. And the early models that we had -- in fact, by the time I finished up with the Corsair, they'd made over 600 pretty major engineering changes in the airplane. And the first ones, we did have a lot of problems. We had leaks in the gas, leaks in the

wings. The wings held these sealed tanks, and they leaked. And then the exhaust stacks, the vibration for that big 2,000-horsepower engine caused a lot of vibration in the engine. The exhaust stacks, the little clips that held them in place and so forth, were continually cracking. And the aircraft, the cockpit, when they designed the aircraft they put a piece of Plexiglas -- there wasn't any floorboard in the airplane. In other words, you had two troughs where your feet ran below the rudder pedals. And then it was open to the bottom of the fuselage. And they installed a large piece of Plexiglas in the bottom of the fuselage, directly under the cockpit, under the seat; so that the idea was that you could look down and see an enemy plane come up underneath you, right? Well, of course, that engine, the minute you turned it on it started spouting a little oil. And it wasn't one flight that the plastic Plexiglas was covered with oil. And it blinded us, so you couldn't see out of it.

BP: I understand it had a lot of torque on the engine, too.

HL: Terrific torque on the engine. When you took off, you cranked in what we called the right tab, a little mechanical device which caused your rudder control to turn over a little bit. And you'd crank in the full right rudder tab. And then when you took off, you stood on the

right rudder pedal to keep the thing straight. Otherwise, it'd pull you right off the runway to the left. And with that 2,000 horsepower -- and you couldn't see out until -- you couldn't see ahead, of course, until the tail came up because the tail dragged. Your engine was -- your cockpit was 14 feet back from the nose of the airplane. And being small, like myself, why, I had a terrible time until I was able to resolve it with a couple of cushions. In addition to sitting on the chute I had a cushion under me and a cushion behind me so I could reach the pedals even though the pedals were adjustable to come back to you. So being a -- it was a big man's airplane, really. I was pretty small in that cockpit. And your first flight in the airplane was a thriller. You just, you held on for dear life and hoped you made it. But it turned out to be one of the greatest airplanes I've ever flown.

BP: Weren't you a little bit scared, though? I mean, that thing's so big, and you had to put cushions out.

HL: Well, it was. But I guess we were a little scared of it because there wasn't anybody in there with you. And that thing, in those days they didn't have the dual cockpit training-type aircraft for the newer aircraft. And we never had a simulator like they have today. You fly a simulator, and you get used to all the characteristics of

the aircraft before you ever fly it. But it turned out to be a wonderful airplane. And I probably have about 2,500 hours in that airplane. So it -- my first combat mission, I came back with 47 holes in it. So I was a believer in that airplane.

BP: Yeah. So how long did you stay in Santa Barbara?

HL: All right, we were there until, let's see, October, September -- I guess -- you'd better turn that off. I've got to...

(break in audio)

HL: But it was...

BP: Sometime in, what, '42, '43?

HL: Yeah, it was in -- '42 I got out, and it was in 1943, and it was around in January of '43.

BP: And what was your squadron?

HL: VMF-215.

BP: Two fifteen? Okay.

HL: And it was around January. I should remember those dates, but I've forgotten. And we went down to San Diego and put our planes aboard a cargo vessel. And they had to be all preserved and so forth to prevent corrosion. We went over, and we -- they took us to Pearl Harbor and dropped us off at Ford Island. And we pulled into Ford Island. And of course, all the ships, the sunken ships, were still in the

bay there. And it was a mess. And security was real tight. And we were -- I was the engineering officer in the squadron. We were getting the airplanes ready to fly at Ford Island. And then we flew them over to Ewa, which was a Marine base there just out on the other side of Pearl Harbor. And we then flew them there for about a month. Two months, I guess, we were there at Pearl. And we did a lot of great training at the time. And of course, there were blackouts every night, and security was real tight. But we got a lot of valuable experience there. And then we ran a -- I was in charge of running an extensive test on duration, duration flights, because we were going to fly our planes to Midway. And the question was, could we make that big leg of four-hour flights? We'd stop at Frigate Shoals, refuel at Frigate Shoals, and it was just like a coral island out in the middle of the ocean.

BP: Frigate Shoals was?

HL: Yes. And then, we'd refuel and go on from there to Midway.

BP: What was the fuel range of...

HL: It was about four hours. It was...

(break in audio)

HL: All right. We decided we could make it to Midway and stopping at Frigate Shoals. We got a Navy transport plane to -- a seaplane -- to navigate for us and route out there.

And we took -- I think we had 18 airplanes, if I recall. And we flew in formation out to -- we had an interesting incident happen on the way out there. You know, we had a relief tube in those darn things, and I had to go to the john something else. I had to use that relief team. Well, flying formation and trying to use that thing is kind of interesting. I was all over the sky. And the skipper, Jim Neefus, saw me fooling around, and he called me on the radio and told me to get the hell back in formation. But we made it and refueled our airplanes and got them all started, because that was another thing. You started that airplane with a starter, an electric starter. And if it didn't work, well, you were really stuck. So we had worries about getting all of them started once we got to Frigate Shoals. But we did. We got them all going.

BP: That was a problem, the start?

HL: Yeah, it was. That was another thing, starting them, because you had an exhaust -- or rather you had a fire extinguisher, a man standing by with a fire extinguisher all time when you started the thing because you were finding that you could start a fire in the darn exhaust stacks. There would be fire coming out. And so, we were a little worried about getting them all out there. But we did. We managed to get them on to Midway. And then we

started from very extensive training there. And we were running patrols also, combat patrols. They didn't expect any Jap attacks, but we did run combat patrols. And security again was pretty tight. But we got excellent training there. And we had a couple of planes land wheels up, of course.

BP: They just forget to put them down?

HL: Forget to put them down, coming in at night, night flights. In fact, we had -- the first one in, the commanding officer, of course, Jim Neefus, he read us the riot act. And darned if the next night another plane didn't come in and land wheels up. And of course, that sudden stoppage on the engine, you had to replace the engine. We were able to get both the airplanes back in commission. And of course, there weren't any injuries. No pilots were hurt. Then, from there we put our planes back on another ship and transported them to Espiritu Santo. En route there we stopped at an island called the Wallis Island and had a lot of crazy experiences there. But just to visit the island and see the natives -- but we ended up at Espiritu Santo. And that's where we did some more tactical flying. But it was very brief before we went on up to Guadalcanal.

BP: What's your first impression of Guadalcanal when you got there?

HL: Well, I don't know. It was a tropical island, and everything was very primitive as far as that's concerned. Coming in later on, by the time we got there, there were Quonset huts. We didn't have to live in tents. However, we would -- the food and everything wasn't too good. The living conditions in the Quonset huts was okay. The shower that we made -- little showers -- can and big drums and put up a kind of a shower thing. And we would be attacked every night with a bomber. A Japanese bomber would come over. And he'd take his engine out of synchronization and run an engine, run it at a different RPM. And when they do this it goes vroom-vroom-vroom. And as a result, they would attempt to keep us awake all night. And before he left he'd always drop one bomb. Well, the anti-aircraft batteries would -- the big floods -- we had big anti-aircraft floods at Guadalcanal by that time. And they'd be trying to spot him in the air. And then they'd be firing away. So we didn't get much sleep.

BP: Now, this was after Guadalcanal had been declared secure, right?

HL: Yes. It was secure. There was still fighting in -- the ground forces were still fighting. It hadn't been completely controlled.

BP: So this is what month? Do you remember?

HL: This was in -- see, this was in '43 and '44.

BP: Because it wasn't really declared secure until February of '43, I think.

HL: Yeah. Well, we were -- it probably had been declared secure. But there was still some fighting and skirmishing on the island, because we'd get some Marines come into camp every once in a while from up in the foothills.

BP: Now, did you have trouble with the Japanese infiltrating your camp?

HL: We never had, never had, on Guadalcanal. We did at Munda later on. But we didn't have any at Guadalcanal.

BP: Okay, so what were you doing in Guadalcanal then? What was your mission?

HL: Well, they still had some F4Fs there. We flew local patrols, combat patrols, although we never had any air attacks during daylight hours. Like I said, the only time was the Washing Machine Charlie, as they called them, would come down at night with that bomber.

BP: So you didn't really see any combat while you were in Guadalcanal or no?

HL: Oh, yes. Yeah, we didn't see any. We were never attacked where we defended Guadalcanal in the air. We were doing the striking then. We were taking off. Each day we had a strike up the slot, as they called it.

BP: Okay. Can you describe those -- what bases or islands you were hitting?

HL: Yeah. We would take off, and we would take off. We'd strike at Munda. And primarily we were starting to hit Kahili up on Bougainville.

BP: Is this prior to the invasion of Bougainville?

HL: Oh, yes, oh yes. Yeah, we hadn't taken Munda. We hadn't taken Bougainville at that time. So our primary -- well, we had two types of missions. One was escorting the bombers. We'd escort the dive-bombers and torpedo bombers on the major strikes at the Japanese islands.

BP: These are Marine Corps?

HL: All Marine Corps, yes.

BP: Out of Henderson?

HL: Out of Henderson Field. And we would rendezvous with the bombers and escort them up there and make attack and then escort them back out. And we had some Marines located on a couple of other islands other than Guadalcanal at that time. Over at Kolombangara I guess there was a couple of Marine squadrons over there.

BP: Kolombangara?

HL: It's Kolombangara, yeah, the island.

BP: Oh, okay. Kolombangara, right?

HL: Gara, yes.

BP: Okay, I know it. There was a big battle there. The Helena was sunk there.

HL: Oh. Okay, well, we would rendezvous with these bombers and escort them up there and make our attack. The other type of flight which fighter pilots really enjoyed were called fighter sweeps, where we'd take off and we'd fly right on the water so they wouldn't pick us up on the way up there. And then we'd pull up and come down on their airfields just at dawn. And the flights up there are -- in fact, my very first mission, which was pretty dramatic because I was flying a wing on -- my flight leader was a Major Tomes was his name, T-O-M-E-S. He had been a fighter instructor at Miami. And he was a great gunner. He was a good shot. And on our way up the slot, his engine quit. And I had to stay with him to see if he got out. I escorted him down. And he was able to land near an island. And I saw him get out of the plane. I knew he was okay. I was able to climb back up and join the flight -- catch them before they got to Guadalcanal.

BP: What happened to Tomes?

HL: He made it to shore, and the coast watches picked him up and brought him back in about a week. He came back and rejoined the squadron. You probably heard about the coast

watchers. They were the Australian -- a lot of them were from Australia and knew the natives and so forth.

BP: Right. So what happened on your -- else happened on your first mission?

HL: All right. Then I was able to join the flight. And you're always taught to fly with another aircraft. Never fly by yourself. I was able to pick up another Corsair pilot who happened to be still by himself. Why, I don't know. But I joined up on him. And he was from another squadron. He wasn't even stationed at Henderson. He was over there at this Kolombangara. So I joined up on him, and we went on in and hit the target. And we were on our way out, and there were Zeros all over the place making charges into the bombers. And all of a sudden he turned 180 degrees and headed right back for the enemy airfield, left the whole formation. And of course, I was hesitant at the minute. Do I follow him, or do I let him go? And I decided to stay with him. Well, we'd just left the formation, and there were Zeros all over us. And I got two shots at one plane attacking him, but I never hit him. And about that time all I saw were red meatballs flying by my -- tracers coming by my cockpit. And then I smelled smoke. I knew I'd been hit. So we had a defensive maneuver.

BP: (inaudible)?

HL: No, no, no. To get away from the Zero, since they had a float carburetor in their aircraft, they could never apply negative G in their aircraft. You have to -- in negative G, we'd take and push our stick, just jam it full forward, okay, run your nose down. And they couldn't stay with you doing that, which I did. And we were about 23,000 feet. I pulled out around 500 feet over the water, and I was headed back towards our base.

BP: Now, did you ever find out why this guy headed back towards the target?

HL: Yes, yes. By the way, I was able to keep my engine running. And I had another almost two hours to return to Guadalcanal. And I just watched my oil pressure. I figured that I'd been hit in one of my oil coolers. And I was able to watch that oil pressure just gradually drop down. I was prepared to make a water landing. But of course, all the rest of the aircraft were back at Henderson Field. I was by myself. So the minute I landed, when I pushed my rudder pedal over, the rudder jammed because there had been two or three holes through the rudder post in the back. If I'd pushed the rudder over while we were in the air, which I couldn't have done, really, but the plane would have been uncontrollable. Anyway, the first thing I did, of course, was get on the phone, because I

found out where he was located, and called. And he got back, too. But he got back. And he was apologizing all over the lot. I was calling him every kind of name in the book. And he was apologizing. But what happened, because we were weaving over the bombers, right, I was flying on one side of him, and I was looking this way. He was looking this way, of course, towards me. And he saw a Jap come up under one of our Corsairs and shoot it down. And he just got livid. He was going to catch that guy, come hell or high water. And I couldn't see him out ahead, but evidently he had his eye on this Zero. He was going to get him. And he left the formation. By the time he realized what he'd done, why, it was too late. But anyway, he did get back, which was amazing.

BP: Do you remember his name?

HL: No, I don't remember his name.

BP: Okay. Did he survive the war? Or, who was the Corsair that was shot down by the Zero that he went after? Was that from your squadron or his squadron or...

HL: Oh, yes. No, no, he was from our squadron. And he was -- now I'm forgetting his name, too. But I've got his name here. I can see it -- tell you what his name was.

BP: We can get that later. Did he survive?

HL: No, no, no. He was killed. He was one of our first pilots lost.

BP: Okay. So you got back and called this guy.

HL: Called him and found out, and he told me the story, what he did. And he was all shot up, too. His plane was pretty well damaged. But on that same flight, one of our pilots ran out of oxygen. And I didn't see him, but the other members of the flight saw him start just to float. I mean, the plane would come down and pick up speed and pull back up again. But he was out. He went all the way down. There was radio silence, so nobody could talk to him. His name was Pickerel. I remember him.

BP: Did he crash?

HL: Yeah, yeah. He crashed. He went into the water.

BP: Now, this is the flight where you had 47 bullet holes when you got back?

HL: Yes. I was a real believer, I'll tell you that. That airplane took a beating. But that was one of the big things that helped us win the war, was our aircraft were built so rugged with self-sealing tanks and everything, and with armor plate. So as a result, they'd take quite a beating and bring you back. With a Zero, you hit the zero, and they'd just flame right away.

BP: So how many missions did you fly out of Guadalcanal there?
Were there others that were memorable like your first one?

HL: No. That was -- well, there were other flights that we were in combat where I shot down Zeros. But there were never any as exciting and hair-raising as that one was, really.

BP: So you did shoot down some Zeros then?

HL: I was credited with three Zeros.

BP: Just from the Guadalcanal area?

HL: Yes.

BP: Okay. Do you remember -- can you describe those? Do you remember them?

HL: Oh, yes. I remember very vividly. One of them was on one of these fighter sweeps. And they had two formations. They evidently found out we were coming. And they had two four-plane formations. The fellows were just climbing up, starting getting in. We came up, and they never saw us coming. We came right up behind them, and my flight leader, he got one and I got one that flight.

BP: Now, they were coming off of what airfield?

HL: They were coming off of Kahili, at the Kahili, which was at Bougainville. And then, another one, we were coming back from a mission, and there were -- this was after we were attacking Rabaul, later on. And my wingman and myself, we

were about 20,000 feet. And I looked down, I saw a Zero about maybe 2,000 feet below. I thought it was a Zero going back to his field from the opposite direction. And it was a perfect -- I guess you'd call it a perfect gunnery run from our training days where you see an enemy plane coming from the opposite direction, and you're able to roll over on your back and do what's called a split ess, come right down vertically like this on him. And you'd settle right in behind him like this. And you had a perfect shot. And I pressed my trigger, and not a single gun would fire. And the doggone guns, I don't know what happened. And I should have been smart enough to tell my wingman to get the plane. But I was so upset about it I pulled right up beside the Jap, looked right in his cockpit at him, and believe it or not I sat there and thumbed my nose at this goddamned Jap. And he was so startled he did a split himself and went diving for the water. But that was a stupid thing to do because I could have let my wingman shoot him down. But then, on another attack, on another fighter sweep, at Rabaul, we caught two planes, two Zeros again, who were attacking us. And we were able to maneuver to get on their tail and shoot them down.

BP: What maneuver did you use to get on their tail?

HL: There it was a matter of pulling the throttle off suddenly. And he was coming up, but you could see them coming. And it was a matter of -- they were overrunning us.

BP: So you just cut the power so that they kept on going past you?

HL: Yeah, they couldn't -- they didn't anticipate it, of course. And they shot by. And I was able to pull over on his tail and shoot him down.

BP: Okay. Now, that was your second?

HL: That was my second kill, yes. And then, the last one was, again, over Kahili. And we were in a dogfight with the Zeros. And I was able to nail the last one. And I'm sure he never even saw me coming.

BP: He didn't get out, no?

HL: No, I didn't see him get out. But then, we were able to destroy a lot of planes on the ground in some of these fighter sweeps we'd come up on. A number of times we'd see planes lined up on the side of the landing strip.

BP: I wonder how many of them were decoys.

HL: Well, you never know. You never know.

BP: Because I've interviewed several fighter pilots.

HL: And revetments, a lot of them are in revetments, too. And you didn't know. The only way you knew whether you hit an airplane, or thought you hit an airplane, was if they

flamed, if they caught fire. But otherwise you wouldn't know. As I say, a lot of them were in revetments like we had revetments in case they attacked us.

BP: How many people did you lose out of your squadron while you were in Guadalcanal?

HL: We went out with -- I think it was a total of 30 -- around 30 pilots. And I think there were a total of 14 or 15 of us came back. But a lot of the pilots we lost were due to operational accidents. We had two take off one morning on pre-dawn takeoffs. And you had to go on instruments immediately. And one fellow, he spun in.

(break in audio)

BP: Okay, so the first one spun in. And the other one...

HL: Yeah. And it was pre-dawn takeoff, as I say. And you had to go on instruments immediately after takeoff -- no horizon. And he spun in off the end of the runway. And the second plane taking off, we figure that he saw the explosion and was looking down at it and spun in right on top of him. We lost two pilots in two planes like that.

BP: So you had 50% casualties then.

HL: We didn't have -- I say that number. Here again, I -- turn it off a minute.

(break in audio)

HL: We lost a pilot on -- if I could go through them, let's see. We lost one pilot on oxygen. He lost his oxygen on that first flight. And then we had this other pilot shot down on that flight, the same. We lost two pilots on that first flight. Then we lost two in these pre-dawn takeoffs. And then we lost two more trying to shoot an anti-aircraft position. One of them was our Medal of Honor guy, Bob Hanson. There was one island that we'd bypassed. And everybody was warned to stay away from this island because there was a Japanese anti-aircraft battery. They were deadly on this island. And two different occasions our pilots -- in fact, this Major Tomes, who was my flight leader to begin with, he was one of them. He was on his way back from a strike, and he elected to try to knock out that gun position. And they knocked him out of the sky.

BP: He was killed?

HL: He was killed. And then, this Bob Hanson, he tried the same thing. And they knocked him out of the sky. He was killed.

BP: How'd he win his Medal of Honor?

HL: He claimed -- I think it was 23 aircraft, 22 aircraft. But unfortunately he was one of these individuals like Boyington. He always managed to lose his wingman someplace

along the line and come back and claim aircraft. This went on...

BP: Didn't have it on film?

HL: No. We had gun film to begin with, but the gun cameras were continually jamming up and not working. So our crews couldn't spend time trying to get those gun cameras working all the time.

BP: So it was just his word that he shot them?

HL: His word. And this took place throughout the entire war with all pilots, from the Germans, the Japanese. After the war was over they had definite matches off between the two countries exact operations, exact days, exact flights. And each side would come back and claim aircraft and with no confirmation. And they were completely false. In fact, the Japanese, the pilots claim that they sunk carriers. And there were never even -- they might have been damaged, but they were never sunk.

BP: In other words, this guy got a Medal of Honor for shooting down so many aircraft, and there's really no proof that he had actually shot them down, eh?

HL: That's right. Yeah, pilots that flew with him -- I never flew with him, but pilots that flew with him claimed that he would do his utmost to lose them. Unfortunately, we had

-- I shouldn't put this information out. I don't have any proof. So I wouldn't want that published anywhere.

BP: About Hanson?

HL: About Hanson or any other pilots. We had a couple more in the squadron that would like to do that some.

BP: Well, we'll read over the transcripts when we're done. And you can tell me what sounds right or not. And we can take what out.

HL: Okay.

BP: Okay. So any other memorable characters in your squadron that you lost? You lost approximately 14. How about the ones who survived?

HL: Well, we had malaria cases, a number of malaria cases, where guys would be ill for a while or something like that. But I don't think that we lost 14. I'd have to go back and just count them up. You think I'd know exactly how many. But we'd have replacement pilots assigned, you see? So when you figure out at the end of the line how many you actually lost, you'd have to pick up all the replacements that we had and reach -- like I say, you had three different intervals where you'd go into combat. You'd be in combat for about three months. And then you'd go out. You'd go on an R&R and then come back for another. So we

had three stints in the program. And each one you'd pick up replacement pilots.

BP: Now, how long were you on Guadalcanal before you were reassigned?

HL: Well, we were on Guadalcanal for approximately -- well, we were on Guadalcanal up until our first R&R. We went three months. And then from there we moved over to another island. I forget the name of the darn thing.

BP: It wasn't Florida?

HL: Pardon? No. I'd have to...

(break in audio)

HL: We came from back from the next R&R, and we went into Munda. We were the first aircraft to land in Munda. And they just -- the Seabees just completed the field -- just completed the runway. And we moved in there. And we were the first planes. And there we did have japs come into our camp, actually. Actually, they were starving. One day we found one in our doggone chow line. And on Munda the...

BP: Well, what did you do with him? They just took him to the POW?

HL: Oh, yeah. The MPs grabbed him and took care of him.

BP: They didn't kill him?

HL: No, they didn't. Then, we had an incident on Munda there where one of the torpedo bombers came back from an attack.

And the pilot crawled out of the plane and told everybody to disperse because there was a hung bomb on the darn airplane, and it had been armed. Of course, that drew attraction to the fellows, all the crew people around the area. And the darn thing exploded. It sent shrapnel all over the place. And shrapnel hit one Marine a good distance from where the plane was. And our flight surgeon had to operate on him and remove the shrapnel from his brain. Otherwise, he'd have died. He operated on him on the doggone mess table. This flight surgeon we had, Dr. Neber, he was really something.

BP: Neber?

HL: N-E-B-E-R was his name.

BP: Okay, but the pilot and everybody else managed to get away from the plane?

HL: Yeah, they got away. There weren't any pilots hit when that darn bomb went off.

BP: And that was on Munda?

HL: Munda.

BP: Okay. Any other incidences where Japanese came in?

HL: No, no incident where the Japanese came into camp other than at Munda. That was the only place.

BP: Now, where did you meet up with Pappy Boyington? Was that at Guadalcanal or what?

HL: No, this was up at Bougainville, when he came into Bougainville. And their squadron was stationed there.

BP: Okay. And he was in -- I don't remember his squadron.

HL: 214 was it? I think it was 214 he was in.

BP: What do you remember about him?

HL: Well, I just remember that anytime I ever saw him he was down on the ground fighting with somebody. He'd get a -- I don't know where he got his beer because we didn't have any beer in the forward area even. The only time we got beer was back at the rest camp. But some of the fellows I did know brought -- when they were transferred overseas took some booze with them in their footlocker and had it. But where he was able to get a hold of it I don't know.

BP: Did you ever have any personal encounters with him?

HL: No, no.

BP: You stayed away from him or...

HL: Yeah.

BP: Okay. Now, see, he was shot down eventually.

HL: Yeah, he was shot down over Rabaul there. And he was captured. And then he was made a prisoner of war. And the only time I saw him after that, I saw him in Sacramento here, believe it or not. In fact, it's a little off the beat here, but he was -- the Navy reserve group here in Sacramento paid him to come up and be guest speaker at one

of their -- at a (inaudible). And everybody was in a tux or formal clothing. And I was working at Aerojet at the time. And one of our chief engineers heard he was coming up. And he asked me if he could attend this thing, attend it. And I said, sure. So I invited him to go along. Pappy came up, and he had no coat. He had a sport coat on which had been soiled in the front and no tie, nothing. And he shows up with his box of books. And every place he went he took his box of books to try to peddle the book. And when he got here he was under the influence. And we got in up to the speaker's table, and he was up at the speaker's table there. And it was a rear admiral who was the emcee. We had some other speakers. And the other speakers, when they were speaking, he was interrupting them all the time with his loud talk and so forth. And then finally it came his term, and the admiral introduced him. And he gets up, and he says, "Well, I don't have any prepared speech. But if anybody wants to ask me a question I'll try to answer it." Well, a JG got up, a Lieutenant JG, who was in the back of the room there. He got up and asked him a real good question. And he looked right at him and he says, "Eff you," right in front of these people. And there were women in the audience also. And this friend of mine from Aerojet said, "Forget it. I'm not interested

in meeting him." And he just made a fool of himself. I was embarrassed. I was in my Marine uniform, and I was embarrassed to be associated.

BP: What year was this?

HL: This would have been in 1978, probably. Well, that was Boyington.

BP: That was Boyington? Okay. Well, it sounds similar to other stories. Okay. So anyway, that was your brief encounter with Boyington. He got shot down sometime shortly after you met him?

HL: Yes. So then, we came back after our third tour. We came back to the States. And I was assigned to El Toro. And we joined a Marine training squadron there, training new pilots, of course. And then shortly thereafter we were assigned to a Marine aircraft group, a Marine carrier aircraft group. They started forming a group to go aboard a carrier. You'd have an all-Marine group. In other words, a dive-bomber squadron, torpedo bomber squadron and fighter squadron on a Navy carrier.

BP: What was the group? Group number what?

HL: This was on the USS *Puget Sound*. And our group number, Jesus...

BP: It's in here though, right?

HL: My mind is -- yep, yep.

BP: I'll get it out there. Now, what had they done to the Corsair in the meantime to make it carrier-safe?

HL: Oh, they made so many changes. The self-sealing tanks were all improved so we didn't have leaks in the tanks anymore. And the cockpit, of course, was all fixed. They put a layer of platform in the cockpit. And then they changed the -- one of the big changes, they changed the whole canopy. It was called a birdcage to begin with. It had little squares in the canopy. And then they came out with a nice streamlined globe-like canopy.

BP: Okay, a one-piece?

HL: A one-piece type, which was a big improvement. And they repaired or fixed the exhaust stack so we wouldn't have all this cracking.

BP: What about the oleo struts?

HL: The oleo struts? No, that was never changed. It was never changed. We still had the long landing gear because of that prop, that 14-foot diameter prop.

BP: What kept it from bouncing over the arresting gear and even the barrier, I would imagine? Because even other models of planes...

HL: Flipped over the barrier, right, because of the -- they would try to -- that usually happened primarily because the pilot would try to take a wave off instead of keeping the

engine on. When he cut the engine, leave it off. And he'd catch the top of that barrier and slam them down on airplanes. It's a shame we didn't have that (inaudible).

BP: I know, I know. I've thought about that a million times.

HL: It was such a simple design. And that would have saved, oh my gosh, lives and all kinds of damage to carriers and stuff, because it puts the carrier out of operation when a plane crashes.

BP: You don't know how many times I've thought about that just looking at that.

HL: Yeah. And the other big impetus to that was the jet because the jet engine does not accelerate. You don't get the immediate response that you get from the prop when you take a wave off. And so, that jet, they had to have it really for the jets because the jets just kept their power on. If you didn't catch a hook you just flew right on off and came around. It's so simple.

(break in audio)

HL: We were stationed in the Russells.

BP: Russells? Okay.

HL: And here's Vella Lavella. We were stationed on Vella Lavella one time. And here's Kolombangara right here. And here's Munda. And here's Kahili and Bougainville. And

then, Rabaul was up here. And that was our last combat, at Rabaul, before we...

BP: Now, when did you leave that? It was '44 sometime?

HL: Nineteen forty-four we returned to the States. And I guess we're talking about back at El Toro, the training squadron. And then we formed this carrier air group and went back out aboard the -- we went up to Seattle, and we commissioned the USS *Puget Sound* carrier.

BP: So I guess if it's possible for a Marine to be a plank owner, you were a plank owner.

HL: Yeah, we were a plank owner on that carrier. And our whole air group was a Marine air group. Of course, the Navy operated the ship. And then, we checked that carrier out. And everybody got carrier-qualified with all the new pilots and so forth. And we had a -- Bob Owens was our air group commander. And Bob Owens had been our squadron commander in Guadalcanal at one time.

BP: Now, what happened to the other squadron commander? What was his name?

HL: Well, we had Jim Neefus took us out. And each one of the three combat periods that we went into combat, we ended up with a different squadron commander. I was telling you we had substitute pilots. Well, the squadron commanders were different also. Bob Owens was with us the entire time. He

was the executive officer when we left the States under Jim Neefus. But on the second combat tour, we had a commander by the name of Herb Robertson. And he came right out from a staff job in Washington someplace. Not Robertson -- Williamson. Herb Williamson was his name. And he was a real gung-ho guy. But he was gung-ho that he had to get a kill. He had to get a kill. And he did his darnedest, and he never did. But he really tried everything he could and took all the great missions that had a chance to get a plane. It never happened. But he was a -- he had premature grey hair. And his face was premature old, you'd call it, I guess. He looked like he was about 50. And he was only -- I think, in his late thirties or something like that, maybe early forties. I don't know. But we got down to R&R, down to Australia, and he'd try to want to get a date with one of the gals, you know? And they thought he was an old man. We used to kid the daylights out of him. He later was in Korea, and they were bird shooting or something. This is getting off the story. But he was bird shooting, and he was coming up out of the rice paddy. A fellow, he gave his gun up, the stock of his gun, to help him up out of it. And he evidently didn't have the safety on. And the guy grabbed the gun and when it slipped out of his hand hit the trigger and took a full shot through his

leg. But he ended up going back flying later on. But we've never been able to get him to any of our squadron reunions. We have a squadron reunion each year. And he lives down in Jacksonville someplace. We've been in contact with him. But then the third combat tour, Bob Owens took over, and he had the squadron. And then we come back, and then he ended up forming this Marine carrier air group and went aboard the *USS Puget Sound*. And we went back out on the *Puget Sound* in a task force, a Navy task force, two other carriers, three carriers. And we ended up in Tokyo Bay just as the Japanese surrendered.

BP: Oh, so you didn't get to fly in combat missions?

HL: So we didn't fly the combat missions. We were part of the occupation force. Our job was to fly over the Japanese airfields and make sure they'd removed the propellers from all the planes. And we had an amusing incident one time. If you landed, if there was a prop on you were to land and make sure that they removed it. And pilots are all pilots. And the enemy are who you are. And they took delight in giving the Marines souvenirs. And this one pilot came back to the carrier one day in a fighter plane, the F6F. We were flying F6Fs, by the way, aboard the carrier.

BP: Oh, not the Corsairs?

HL: Not the Corsairs, no. The jeep carriers, they couldn't handle that. So he came back to the carrier with his landing gear down. And everybody was wondering what in the hell was going on. So he came in, and he landed. Here he had a...

BP: He landed with his landing gear up?

HL: No, no, no. No, the landing gear was down. But he came in, and yeah, he had his gear down when he came into the carrier. But when he came back to the carrier, all the way back he had his landing gear down. So we figured it had some hydraulic problem or something. Here, he had landed to make them take the prop off one of the planes. And the Japs had given him a console radio. And there was no place to put it. So they secured it up in the wheel well and left with the gear down. And of course, the minute he hit the deck with that thing, why, that thing came flying out of there. I mean, it had tubes in it and everything, you know? That thing flew down the deck and fouled the deck up. Well, the captain of the ship, this Charlie Coe, he almost gave him a court martial.

BP: C-O-E?

HL: Pardon?

BP: C-O-E, Coe?

HL: Yes, yeah, Charlie Coe was his name, the captain. But on all of our operations with the three carriers, you know -- and whenever you go into flight operations, all three carriers turn into the wind at the same time. And they go max speed to get the maximum amount of wind across the deck. So it's very important to get all of your planes off as quickly as you can and to get them back on as quickly as you can. And every operation that we had en route to Japan, why, our carrier group had all their planes on and off before the two Navy carriers did. So the skipper of our ship, this Charlie Coe, would always get a big "well done" from the admiral. And as a result, when we finally left the combat area and started back, we stopped at Hong Kong and stopped at The Philippines and made all these Goodwill stops. And he would drop all the boats over the side and take the Marine pilots ashore. They'd get the first ones ashore on these boats. So he kind of looked out for the pilots because they'd given him a (inaudible).

BP: Did you have any operational losses during that time?

HL: We did not have -- we had one plane, I think, almost go over the side one time. But we never -- as far as I remember, we never lost a plane on that carrier, that carrier operation. We had about eight months, I guess, operating that carrier.

BP: Okay, out around Japan, eh? What do you remember about some of the people you met during this occupation tour? And how -- I mean, any problems within the Japanese military personnel?

HL: Well, that was interesting. We got to go ashore in Yokosuka, Japan just after the truce had been signed. And I was interested in their aircraft factory there. And I went in the aircraft factory. And it was just like they'd blown the whistle for lunch and everybody had put their tools down and walked out, because their tools and all their lathes, all their manufacturing equipment, everything was just like normal. And we went back into caves they had in the hillside. And they had these huge caves. They had enough parts -- or they had assembled something like 400 aircraft engines, assembled, ready to go into aircraft. And they had all kinds of aviation supplies. But the thing that interested me the most was I went into the engineering office, and they had this great big walk-in vault. And they had blueprints for almost every American aircraft that we had, complete sets of blueprints.

BP: I wonder where they got them.

HL: Well, that was your spies in this country, I guess, were able to work these things. But it was amazing. I just couldn't believe it. And the Japanese people, you wouldn't

see many people on the street. They kept in their houses. And they would never look at you. If they saw you coming down the street they'd kind of duck off to the side. They weren't the least bit interested in talking with you. I was interested in seeing some of their homes, but we never could get in them.

BP: And problems with US military personnel abusing any Japanese?

HL: No, no, no. And of course, they'd been taught that we'd rape their women and kill them and all this business and so forth. And I think they were so dumbfounded that we didn't come in and treat them like they'd been treating a lot of Chinese and so forth.

BP: And how about POWs? Did you come across any American POWs while you were over there?

HL: No, I never met one of the POWs. They scooted them out in a hurry. I did run into POWs when we were in Hong Kong. We went in there and ran into one of the lads who'd been in the Royal Hong Kong Volunteer Corps. And he was a Portuguese lad. And he'd been a jockey at one time. He was a small fellow. And he was -- the Japanese came in to Hong Kong. And he was a part of the Royal Hong Kong Volunteer Corps. And it was like a glorified Boy Scout troop, I guess. But anyway, they were sent out to prevent

the Japanese from landing. And the Japanese came in with 20,000 troops. And of course, they wiped them out. And those -- they took prisoners of most of them. And they were -- he was a prisoner over on the mainland side of Kowloon. And he told us some real sad tales. He was -- his buddy was a prisoner with him. And the buddy, who evidently was married at the time, and his wife would come across in a sampan across the bay each day to see him. And one day she tried to kiss him through the fence. And the Japanese got her. And she was pregnant at the time. They took and put a hose in her mouth and kept filling her up with water until she died. And the husband went berserk from watching this incident. Then, they were taken from that prison there in Kowloon to Japan or to Tokyo. And they worked in a mine for four years during the war. And when they were finally -- the Japs finally surrendered, they started flying these prisoners back. And they were flying them in a B-24, a bunch of them. And the pilot -- the US planes were flying them back. And they told them to stay away from the bomb bay doors. And there were four of them back there near the doors, or on the doors, I guess, playing cards or something. And somehow or other the darn thing opened, and they dropped four of these guys after

being prisoners of war. All these people dropped down to their deaths.

BP: Most of them were Brits?

HL: No, these were -- some of them were Chinese, and some of them were English. And this fellow happened to be Portuguese. And I still contact him. He's come here to visit me from -- he lives now in Australia. And he ended up as harbormaster there in Hong Kong. In fact, my wife was over there one time visiting him. He took her to dinner over at the big Peninsula Hotel and everything. And so, we kept in contact. And then he came here to visit one time. And he's in Australia today.

BP: Now, there were thousands of Americans of Japanese ancestry who were trapped in Japan was Pearl Harbor was bombed. And a lot of them were drafted into the Japanese military against their will. Some of them did voluntarily. Did you ever run across any of them?

HL: No, I never did.

BP: Okay. How about Japanese Americans in the military serving as translators over there?

HL: Nope, I never ran into those people either.

BP: Okay. And this Owens, who was the head of your group, he stayed in the military after that or no?

HL: Yes. He retired as a major general. He lives down in Newport Beach. He comes to our reunions every year.

BP: Okay. Now, you stayed in the military, too? Retired or no?

HL: Yeah. Well, what happened, that's kind of interesting also. During the war, Jim Neefus talked me into taking a regular commission, and with the understanding that as soon as the war was over I was able to go back and finish my education, because I had another year to do. So we were on the carrier coming back, and I put in my letter to Washington to go back to school, take a leave of absence or something to finish my education per our agreement. And they come back and said, "Well, no. You're going to have to go to all these Marine schools, first of all, before we can release you to get your civilian education." So I said, well, then I'm going to resign because I was bound and determined to get my degree. So I resigned, or I sent my resignation in. And we were on our way back on the ship. And I mailed it in. They had some kind of a mail carrier (inaudible). Anyway, I was getting nowhere. And I had one of the lads in our squadron. His dad wrote the GI Bill of Rights. And he said, "Do you want my" -- he was in Washington. He said, "Do you want my dad to give you some assistance?" And I said sure. So one month later I had a

release from the Marine Corps, acceptance of my resignation. And I had 65 days to do on my leave coming to me. And I started right back in Michigan in January.

BP: January of '46?

HL: This was January of '46. While I was there during this terminal leave, they called me from Washington and said they changed their mind and would let me -- if I wished to withdraw my resignation, they'd let me continue on full flight pay and everything else and complete my education. So I withdrew my resignation and went on and finished. And then, from there I was assigned to new duty. Where did I go? From school, I came to Cherry Point, North Carolina.

BP: Now, when did you retire from the Marine Corps?

HL: I retired in 1962.

BP: At what rank?

HL: At lieutenant colonel.

BP: Lieutenant colonel? Okay. Were you flying jets by then?

HL: Oh, yes. Yeah, then I was -- I had two squadrons. I had a Marine squadron at El Toro -- VMF-314 -- flying Panther jets. And I won the all-Navy weapons meet one year. At El Centro they had the weapons meet with all the Navy squadrons and Marine squadrons in the country. And we had this big meet down here. I had this Marine fighter

squadron, and we won the gunnery meet over all the Marines and Navy squadrons. It was quite an event.

BP: No, you took a civilian job after you retired, right?

HL: Right. But let me just finish. After I had the F9 squadron, then they were looking for somebody to take a new squadron called the F4D Skyray, which was a supersonic night fighter bird, overseas.

BP: You call it a Skyray?

HL: Yeah, Skyray. And Marion Carl was the wing operations officer at the time and also the (inaudible) commanding over there. And he was instrumental in my -- as a result of winning this gunnery, getting me right from one squadron commander to another. And so, I got two squadrons in a row. And I got this F4D squadron and took it over to Japan. I operated over there. And we got involved in the Korean War situation, and they pulled us out of Atsugi and shot us down to China, to Taiwan. And we operated there during the Korean War situation and then came back to Atsugi again, came back. But I had planned all along to leave the service whenever my kids reached high school age. I had great years in high school, and I thought my kids should deserve the same thing. So I was stationed in Washington at the headquarters of the Marine Corps in charge of all kinds of training, technical training. So I

put in my letter. I had a hell of a nice job offer at Aerojet General Corporation (inaudible). So I put in my letter. My wife did not leave service. She (inaudible). So I retired. Marion Carl, he was upset with me. He figured I could make general if I stayed in. But it worked out fine because all three of my kids went on, finished school, like I said, Santa Barbara.

BP: I wonder what years they graduated. I may have even gone to school with them. Who knows?

HL: Well, no. I don't know how old you are. My older boy's now 51.

BP: I'm 55 now.

HL: Are you? Okay. Well, I could check back what year they graduated. But they all were very successful. They all ended up owning their own businesses. My older boy ended up as Executive VP of Burger King. And he now has his own marketing consultant business. He lives in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. And he commutes between Steamboat and New York City on the weekends.

BP: Now, did you retire from Aerojet?

HL: I retired then in 1987 from Aerojet. I retired from the Marine Corps in '62.

BP: Now, this Owens, he went on to become a...

HL: He went on to become a major general and did a great job.

BP: Now, Marion Carl, was he -- he was a fighter ace in World War II, right?

HL: Yes. Marion shot down 19 Japs. And he was one of the top ten test pilots in the world. He was head of flight test at Patuxent River.

BP: I think that's where Alex Vraciu met him. They had an impromptu dogfight. He didn't know who Marion Carl was at the time. And he says, "Who the hell was that?"

HL: That could very well be. In fact, I think Marion's mentioned one of those incidents down there. He didn't mention who it was. But he was head of flight test. And he had so many firsts -- the first helicopter pilot, first jet pilot to land on a carrier. In fact, he would fly all the operational requirements of an aircraft when the industry was trying to sell an airplane to the Navy. Why, the secretary of the Navy would call on Marion to go and flight test the airplane, put it through its specs, and versus a Navy pilot in some cases, because they didn't have Navy pilots -- senior pilots, anyway -- that would take and land one of these planes on a carrier or put it through its ordnance tests.

BP: He was, what, 84 when he was murdered by somebody who broke into his house, right?

HL: Yeah, he was 82. And he lived up on Umpqua River there out of Roseburg, Oregon, 17 miles out of Oregon. He had a great spot there, about 34 acres right on the Umpqua River. And this kid, at 11:00 at night, his wife was sitting in their living room reading and watching TV, and Marion was in bed. And this 19-year-old kid broke in the door with a big German shepherd dog and had a sawed-off shotgun and demanded her keys to her car and her money. And then he said, "Are you alone?" She said, "Yes." About this time Marion heard the commotion, and he came out of the bedroom. And this kid said, "I thought you said you were alone." He raised the gun and fired at her. She dove out of the way. It caught the top of her head. And then, he dove on him, and he just got it up in time to catch right in the face with that the second time. Yeah, it was real sad.

BP: Yeah. What's another question?

(inaudible)

HL: They treated me great. They sent me to Stanford to grad school, and then I got with Aerojet (inaudible). I enjoyed the flying. I never considered myself a military man. I really enjoyed the flying. And that was probably another reason that I elected to leave, because they got so tight on flying for any senior officer. Over the years at Aerojet...

BP: Roger -- what was the name?

HL: Roger Conant, C-O-N-A-N-T. He got out of the service after the war and ended up as one of the chief test pilots for McDonnell Douglas. And he would go to these foreign countries whenever they'd sell an aircraft to a foreign country. And he'd go over and check out their pilots. And these are commercial airline-type aircraft. And his wife died a few years ago. And he kind of went back to his youth days and he decided to become a motorcycle rider. He's got a great big Harley motorcycle, which he cruises around the country on. And he ended up -- well, he'd retired, of course, from McDonnell Douglas. He recently had a heart attack, and he's not in too good a shape right now.

BP: But what do you remember about him during your squadron days?

HL: He was always a real good pilot, real down-to-earth, good pilot, knew what he was doing all the time. I don't recall any real special incidents.

BP: He was an ace then, eh?

HL: Yes. He ended up as an ace.

(break in audio)

HL: -- after the war with just the pilots. And then we enlisted personnel found out about it. Then they had a

reunion of their own with the squadron. And then we said, well, why are we having two? Why don't we have the officers and enlisted together? And that's what we started doing. And Roger was always against this. He wanted just the pilots to have their own reunion.

BP: Were there any of the enlisted personnel that really stand out in your memory from those days? I mean, they were pretty important, keeping those...

HL: Oh yeah. We had a warrant officer, a gunner that was our engineering officer, really. And the ground crews did such a fantastic job. And they were subjected a lot more than we were to the malaria situation, I guess, and the food situation. And a lot of them got sick. But they would work around the clock to keep as many airplanes in commission. And of course, if a plane went down, you had to be careful because everybody starts stealing parts off of it to try to keep the others in commission. But this ground crew of ours were so great that we were finally given orders to come back to the States. And a Navy carrier came in. I think it was the Franklin. And they had VF-17, a Navy squadron, which was a pretty famous Navy squadron during the war. And they put them ashore at Bougainville. And the Navy went to the Marine Corps and requested to hold our ground crew for another three to four

months to support that Navy squadron, VF-17. And it was a real controversial situation because our ground crews were so shot that they needed to get home, get rest. And they never got this R&R like we got, you know?

BP: They had to stay there, eh?

HL: And so, they ended up holding them. And I wrote to every one of the parents of our ground crew and explained what was going on and why they were being held and so forth and told them what a great job their kids had done, their sons had done and so forth. And to this day, when we have a reunion, there's one fellow that always pulls this letter that he's carried in his wallet all these years, that letter that I wrote to his parents. And he still has that letter. When he got home, they...

BP: What was his name? Do you remember his name?

HL: I don't remember his name. But he gave -- he pulls that letter out and shows me that I wrote to his parents.

BP: But they all finally made it back to the States and were reassigned to other squadrons?

HL: Yeah, they all came back. Of course, some of them got so sick that they would be hospitalized for a while from the islands. But they did a great job, just a fantastic job.

BP: You ever have any Section 8 cases in your squadron?

HL: No. And then we had -- my experiences with the VMF-115 was the F4D squadron. And I took that squadron over to Japan, as I mentioned. We were stationed at Atsugi.

BP: This is after the war?

HL: This is after the war, yeah. And I had nothing but problems with that squadron.

BP: The personnel or the planes or what?

HL: The personnel. They were all handpicked pilots because it was the first supersonic jet that the aviation...

(break in audio)

BP: Today is Friday the 13th, the year 2001. I'm in Sacramento, California. And this is my second interview with Mr. Langstaff. The interviewer is Bruce Petty.

(break in audio)

BP: Tell me how to use the split ess as sort of a tactic.

HL: Oh, yes, yes. Yeah, that was one of our trainings. And it did. It came in very handy, except that my guns were seized, so I couldn't fire a single gun. And that would have been a real kill. The guy was -- he never even knew we were there.

BP: Now, was there anything else in your training that really helped you in combat or actually saved your life?

HL: When we stopped at Hawaii on our way out...

BP: The pen just -- yeah, I left mine in the car.

HL: Is that your pencil, by the way?

BP: No, it's yours.

HL: It came as kind of surprise. I don't know who owns it. Yes, one of the best training areas that we had was in Hawaii and in Midway. But in Hawaii, the air force was there, and the Navy was there, okay? And everybody was open game when you were in the air. If we spotted an air force plane, we would end up getting in a dogfight with them, other fighters, and Navy pilots. And they were looking for us also when they were up. So even though we were on a special training assignment or something like that, tactics or something of that sort, when we'd see another aircraft, another fighter aircraft, why, we'd get in a tangle with them. And that gave us a lot of good experience. And then, of course, out at Midway we had a lot more experience.

BP: What kind of experience did you get out at Midway?

HL: Well, we had flights that would go out and simulate the Japanese coming back in to attack the island. And we would intercept them. And of course, the dive-bomber squadrons and torpedo bomber squadrons, of course, they were practicing bombing attacks out to sea and various targets.

BP: So that helped you later when you were in war?

HL: Oh yeah, yeah, because some guys, some fellows came out there as replacements right out of flight school with no training whatsoever before they got there.

BP: Before they got to where?

HL: Before they got to actual combat.

BP: Oh, some of your replacements?

HL: Yeah, they were replacements that joined our squadron.

BP: So they were rushing them through so fast?

HL: Yeah, and they'd come out there. By the time I saw combat first, I think I had 400 hours, whereas some of these guys only had about 200 hours when they got out.

BP: And not the same task training that you did with the dogfights?

HL: No, no, no. They hadn't had it. They just came right from flight training, and they were assigned to a squadron -- boom.

BP: Did you have any accidents when you were doing all these pretend dogfights?

HL: No, never did. However, I think I mentioned, after I got that F4D squadron, the supersonic jets, that two of them collided on a dogfight by themselves. So it happens.

BP: Okay. You already answered my -- you mentioned that VMF-215 was ranked fourth in the number of enemy kills during

the war. Do you know anything about who was first, second and third? These are Marine fighter squadrons.

HL: Yes, the Marine fighter squadrons. And I think -- well, I shouldn't say because I'm not positive. I'm not positive. But VMF-223, I think, was well up there. And I don't know what Boyington's total number, his squadron was either. So I can't help you on that one.

BP: Okay.

HL: That wasn't listed in that article?

BP: I don't remember it, but I've got -- I have...

(break in audio)

BP: -- visuals in the article, or in the oral history. Can you give me some description of the three kills you have in terms of, you know, did the plane just flame and crash or explode or fall apart or nose in? Or how would you describe kill number one?

HL: Well, the first one I hit, smoke immediately started coming out of the plane. And then it burst into flames. And I didn't stick around to watch it go down because in your tactics, when you strike, you don't sit around and dogfight with the Zeros because they were more maneuverable than we were, okay? So you make your pass and hope you hit them. And I just -- looking back out of the hole in my shoulder,

I could see the plane flame. So I knew that he was shot down.

BP: So what do you do? You kind of dive on him, shoot him and keep diving out?

HL: Yeah. See, we dove down, on this first kill anyway. There were two of us, this Major Tomes and myself. And we dove down. And they were climbing up from their airfield and forming up. And they never saw us coming. We dove down and came right up underneath them, and we just kept going. He hit the one on the right, and I hit the one on the left, and we just kept on going.

BP: Okay. Could you see the pilot? You said you looked back, but could you see the pilot?

HL: No, I couldn't tell if the pilot got out or not.

BP: Okay. How about...

HL: And then, the second one was -- that was an actual dogfight where we were tangling with them. And they were trying to get on our tail, and we were trying to get on them. And that was when I pulled the throttle off, and the plane pulled up in front of me.

BP: So he was actually on your tail then?

HL: Yeah, he was firing at me. And as soon as he passed by me, I was able to pull up on him. And here again, I see smoke

and a burst of flame as I'm passing him. I was going by him in a hurry then.

BP: Okay. Did he get any hits on you when he was shooting?

HL: I forget. I think I did get some hits in that airplane that time. I don't recall. But they weren't damaging enough to put me out of control.

BP: Okay. Now, the third one, I think you said he didn't even know you were there. And that's about all you said about it. How would you describe?

HL: Well, the one plane that I did the split ess on, I didn't fire him because my guns were seized.

BP: Right, but number three...

HL: The third one -- that was kind of a freak one. This was a single plane by himself again, which was real odd because usually those guys were all together. And he was evidently -- he had gotten separated from his formation. And he was headed back. I was headed back for my field, and he was headed back for his. And I thought it was a Zero, but I was kind of low on fuel to attack him. But jeez, I said I've got to get another kill here somehow or other. And I was able to come back and just peel up. And I was going faster than he was. He wasn't wide open. I had full power on. And I was able to gradually gain on him when he was up ahead of me. And here again, he never knew I was there. I

came up underneath him. And the same thing happened. And all these were Zeros. I never had a chance at some of their dive-bombers, these Vals, as they were called. Some of the fellows shot a number of those planes down.

BP: So again, it's a smoke and a flame?

HL: Smoke and flame. That's all there is to it. I never saw pieces like you see in a war picture. You see pieces fly off the airplane. I never saw that.

BP: And you never saw any of them get out?

HL: And I never saw the pilots get out, no. You know, they attacked some of our people before we got there. It never happened to anybody in our squadron that I know of. But they bailed out, and they fired at them in the air and shot them up. My wingman on Guadalcanal, a fellow by the name of George Cross, we were up at Rabaul, attacking at Rabaul. And they came on. We were strafing their chips. They were cruisers. It was kind of crazy because the firepower from the cruisers, it's a wonder we weren't knocked down.

BP: Yeah, I was going to ask you about that, too, because it mentioned in the article about attacking two Japanese light cruisers.

HL: Two cruisers coming out of the -- they were camouflaged up there at Rabaul along the shoreline. And we were making a -- we were escorting the dive-bombers again. And they were

making an attack on Rabaul. And all of a sudden these two cruisers came steaming out from the side of the island. We never saw them. And I was leading the flight. And I made a diving run on them firing at the ship. But they were firing a lot back at us.

BP: You and how many other planes?

HL: There were four from my flight. And my wingman, Zeros jumped us as we were pulling off of that. And he didn't hit me, but he hit him. And he caught the ammo on fire in his wing. And he was able -- there were a lot of rainclouds around. He was able to duck into a raincloud and put out the fire in that wing.

BP: Oh, by just being in the clouds?

HL: Just being in the clouds. It evidently wiped out the fire. And we joined up right way and got the hell out of there. And we got back to the field, and we were stationed at Munda at that time. And he attempted to slow the plane down for landing speed, and he had been hit in his elbow also. And he had a big hole in his wing where the ammo had exploded and so forth and caught fire. And he couldn't get the airplane below about 180 knots. He couldn't control it when it got slower speed. So it was determined there was no way was he going to be able to land that airplane. So they decided to have him bail out. And so, he came -- he

got it up to about 1,000 feet. And he rolled over on his back and dropped out of the plane straight down. And his chute opened right away, but there was a good wind blowing. And there was a crash boat that was out standing by to pick him up. But before he hit the water he was able to unhook his shoulder straps and one leg strap. And he couldn't get the other one undone before he hit the water. And the wind picked up his parachute and dragged him behind it just under the water. And he almost drowned. They dove in. A fellow dove in with a big knife and cut him loose from the parachute. And they pulled him aboard and gave him artificial respiration to bring him around.

BP: Oh, he was out, eh?

HL: Yeah. And he had been injured. He's shot in the arm also. But he came around and he was okay.

BP: He was out of the war after that then?

HL: No, no. He stayed on. He wasn't...

BP: Oh, so it didn't shatter the bone?

HL: Didn't shatter the bone, no. It didn't bother it that much. But he had Plexiglas -- the glass had been shattered also in his canopy when the bullets went through. So that didn't help the situation. But he just died here -- it's been two years ago now. And he was quite a man. He was an enlisted man. He came up through the ranks. And he was

still -- I guess he was still a tech sergeant when he was in our squadron.

BP: So they had enlisted Marine pilots, too?

HL: Yes.

BP: Because I know the Navy did.

HL: The Navy and Marines had -- they called them NAPs, naval aviation pilots. But he was -- there were quite a few of them. Let me stop here for a second.

(break in audio)

BP: You made a run on -- you were flying on Munda. You made a run on Rabaul. And then you just saw him split?

HL: We saw the carrier, the cruisers, come out. So I elected to strafe them, which in a way was kind of foolish because they have so much firepower. And it's a wonder one of our flight didn't get knocked down at the time.

BP: And were they firing the equivalent of a five-inch proximity shell at you or something?

HL: Oh yeah, oh sure, sure.

BP: Any close calls?

HL: I don't recall. No one that I know of got shrapnel in their aircraft on that run. But it was something to see those two cruisers come out of there.

BP: You didn't do much damage to them, though, with 50-caliber?

HL: No, God no. We kept the people down on the deck, probably, but that was about it.

BP: And then after you pulled that, that's when the Zeros jumped you?

HL: That's when the Zeros jumped us, yeah. They were around the area when we were coming in, attacks on the bombers and so forth, which we were protecting.

BP: Did you lose any other planes in that raid, the bombers?

HL: We didn't from our squadron. But I think one of the dive-bombers was lost. And I think one of the torpedo bombers was lost on that flight.

BP: With the crews?

HL: Yes.

BP: Because, you know, Japanese had a habit of executing airmen that they captured. Boyington was very lucky. I think just about everybody shot down over Saipan during that battle -- but he never -- well, if they found them, what they found was not much because they were pretty brutal when they killed them all. And I came across some...

(break in audio)

HL: We had some interesting experiences in Guadalcanal, personal experiences, I mean, that didn't have to do with combat, which you might have been interested in. We had an intelligence officer in the squadron. He's the ground

officer. And he -- well, first of all, I told you about Washing Machine Charlie who'd come over at night and drop the bomb. Well, one time -- I don't think I told you -- he dropped the bomb on the ammo dump, an old ammo dump of the Japanese that they had there. And it started that thing off. And it lasted for two or three days. And I don't know if I told you this. Shells were flying all over the place. And we had to stay in dugout ditches and trenches like foxholes to avoid being hit by this stuff. And some of the shells ended up going right through our Quonset huts and so forth. And the whole strings of machine gun bullets, and machine gun bullets all fixed together, you know, and they would start going off. It was like the Fourth of July.

BP: So you're stuck in your slit trenches.

HL: Yeah, we had to stay underground because of these darn things.

BP: For two days?

HL: Yeah, it was two or three days that it went on. And then, after that, there were a lot of these shell casings, the brass shell casings, from 20-millimeters and even five-inch guns. And this intelligence officer got some of these and decided to make ashtrays out of them. Well, some of them still had little detonator caps in the end of them. And he

would get rid of that by putting a nail in a little board and just tapping them. And there'd be just a little explosion, but they wouldn't do anything. Well, we were all sitting out in a group, including the CO of the squadron, around this -- in front of our camp there. And this crazy intelligence officer was tapping a couple of those over on the side. Well, one of them exploded and caused the casing, the shell casing, to fragment and threw the fragments all over the place. And two of them hit the commanding officer. He ended up having to have his arm -- go into the hospital and have his arm fixed and everything. It was something else. Of course, needless to say, everybody was really unhappy with this guy from then on. But then -- what was the other thing? When we first got there, they had foxholes, only these were big rooms that had been dug down, I mean, with a shovel of some sort, and dug these out. And then they put these big coconut palm trunks over the top and then covered that over and then covered it over with soil and so forth so you couldn't see them. And you'd have an entrance, a pretty sharp entrance you'd have to go down to get in under these things. But they offered great protection if there's any bombing. Well, the first night we were there, they came down.

BP: Who's they?

HL: The Japs came down to bomb us.

BP: Airplanes?

HL: Yeah, bombing us. And we were standing out in front of this thing watching the air show, and nobody wanted to go down in these things because they collected water in the darn things, you know, and everything would be damp. And so, we were standing around outside the thing watching the anti-aircraft batteries and searchlights looking for the planes. And the CO had told us to get the heck down in the darn thing. Well, he'd gone down. He was in it, underground. And one of these rounds came down. And when a bomb drops, in your movies you hear them all whistle. Well, they don't whistle. They go whoosh. They making a whooshing sound. Well, I heard, or we all heard the darn thing coming down. It sounded like it was going to hit pretty close. And we all made a dive for the entrance of that thing at the same time. Well, it just happened that the CO was just coming up to see what was going on. We hit him and knocked him over backwards. And we just ran right over him going down into that damn foxhole. But little things like that would happen once in a while.

BP: Well, you mentioned in the article, too, that there was a compound that had a few Japanese POWs there.

HL: Yes, yes.

BP: You said that the Marines coming back would throw hand grenades in there.

HL: Yeah, yeah. It got pretty bad. That happened, I think, only once, maybe twice. But those Marines, you know, they were so fed up with having their buddies shot up in the jungle and so forth. And so, when they came back, they didn't have any use for those Japs over there, the prisoners. Of course, we didn't take many prisoners. They'd commit suicide before they'd be taken prisoner.

BP: So how did they put a stop to that?

HL: Well, they just -- the ground commander, commanding general, he got the word out that that was completely forbidden. And I think they tried to court martial one of the kids that did it. So word got around in a hurry.

BP: So they got those POWs out of there after a while? How many were in there?

HL: Oh, they only had -- they'd have maybe five. We didn't take many prisoners. They had five prisoners in there.

BP: They got them out of there, though?

HL: Yes. Oh, yeah. They moved them from then on. They took them to another island someplace. I don't know where.

BP: Who was bringing them in? The Marines were bringing them in, and then...

HL: Oh yeah. The Marines would capture them and turn them over to the -- they knew that was the only place we had a prison.

BP: Okay. Some of the Marines who were out there in the hills doing all the mopping up, did you ever have a chance to meet any of them or talk to them?

HL: Never did. Nope, never did.

BP: Okay. Okay, it's not the same thing as Barbers Point then?

HL: No, it was right next to Barbers Point, okay? But it was called Ewa Marine Air Station there.

BP: Okay. Can you fill us in on a little bit? You were training new pilots.

HL: Well, I was off to school. I went back to Hartford, Connecticut, to Pratt & Whitney. I was sent back. I was the engineering officer on a squadron. They sent me back to the Pratt & Whitney engine school, which is a great -- it was about a six-week course, I guess. And then I came back to the squadron from there. And we worked in this training squadron until we formed this Marine carrier air group.

BP: Now, were you the same squadron, VMF-215? You more or less kept together?

HL: No, no. No, 215 stayed out there. The number stayed. They filled it up.

BP: But the pilots came back with you.

HL: The pilots came back, yes.

BP: Were they dispersed to different assignments?

HL: Yes. They were given different assignments. Most of us were assigned to El Toro.

BP: Okay, so a lot of you still stayed together then.

HL: We stayed together, although we were dispersed into maybe three different squadrons there at El Toro.

BP: But were you actually involved in the training of pilots there?

HL: Yes.

BP: You'd take them up and show them this?

HL: Yeah, we trained them and gave them all the information we had and worked them out in air-to-air tactics, air-to-air combat.

BP: So this was advanced training?

HL: Oh yes. This was after they'd finished flight training and commission. And they were assigned there for their training just before being assigned to go overseas as replacements.

BP: So this was their last stop, sort of fine-tuning before they went over?

HL: That's correct.

BP: Okay. So anything stand out in your mind about the home front there in California then during the war?

HL: Well, yes, because when we received orders there, they didn't have sufficient quarters at the Marine air station for the officers. So the Marine Corps contracted for the Laguna Beach Hotel and took over the Laguna Beach Hotel. And we had two fellows to a room. They had the civilian personnel maintaining the hotel. There were no meals served there. But that's where we lived. And it worked out fine. It was a great, great place to stay. And so, we -- after being in Guadalcanal and come back to that, it was pretty nice. And at meals or in the evening we'd take our evening meal around different restaurants around town. And a number of the fellows rented houses, went in together on a house or an apartment. So they were scattered all over the Laguna Beach area. But it was wonderful. We'd get up early in the morning, and we'd drive up to the base. We'd have breakfast on the base and then report to the squadron. And then, at around 4:30 when we finished up the day we'd jack down, and in the summertime, of course, we'd hit the beach. And right next to the hotel there was a big club or casino like, a cocktail lounge and so forth right adjacent to the hotel. The fellows would always end up over there to have a drink and talk war stories.

BP: Now, was it lights out up and down the coast then? I mean, you couldn't...

HL: Oh, yes. Yeah, it was still security. In fact, we had a patrol normally running up and down the coast, which was kind of useless.

BP: On the beach, you mean?

HL: Yeah, on the beach. And of course, the fellows loved to flat-hat down the beach. In fact, that brought up another incident. The new general came...

BP: Flat-hat, you mean fly low to the beach?

HL: Fly low to the beach. And then a new general checked into the air station out there. And it was bachelor officer's quarters, period, in that hotel. But he proceeded to take over two or three rooms right on the front, on the waterfront, and moved his family in, his wife and his two children, into those rooms. Well, he was there. A short time after he was there he saw some of the guys flat-hat and so forth. So he made a -- and, plus, the gals would be down in the hotel and so forth. And I guess the first night he was there, there was a big party next to his room, in the next adjacent room. And so, he proceeded to assign a duty officer. Every day there had to be a duty officer in the hotel. And he made him sit up on the roof with binoculars. And anybody that was found flat hatting, he

was to report their number. And if he didn't take their number down, report them, or if he didn't see to it that every guest was out of the hotel by such-and-such an hour in the evening, why, he'd be kicked out of the hotel and be put back up at El Toro in a room at the base. So he made it miserable for everybody, and everybody was out to get him. Boy, the fellows were all upset about that.

BP: This is a flying general or no?

HL: Yeah, he was a flying general. But he never flew. They finally -- after the war, they got rid of him. I don't know where he went.

BP: Okay. Okay. Did you have any accidents there training these pilots?

HL: Well, there was -- we didn't have -- yes, we did. We had, you know, two cases where pilots were actually killed. Actually, they were killed at Mojave. When we'd go up there, we'd go up there to have a lot of our ordnance work. But two of our pilots that came back with us -- a fellow by the name of Don Aldrich, he flew a Corsair back to -- let's see. I guess that happened later. He was stationed at Quantico when that happened. But at El Toro, one of our fellows, Harold Spears -- and both of these fellows, Aldrich and Spears, had claimed, I don't know, 12, 15 aircraft. And here again, nobody confirmed them. But

Spears, he was flying a dive-bomber then, one of the SBDs. He had taken a cross-country someplace in the SBD. And he was coming back. And he got too slow in his approach. And he spun in and killed himself off the end of the runway. And Aldrich, as I say, he took off from Quantico and ended up going up to a field out of Chicago where he used to fly a light plane. He used to fly out of there as private flying. And he took the Corsair up there, and he decided to go in and see his buddies at this airfield. Well, it was a cinder field. And it had been raining a lot out there and so forth.

BP: Cinder? What do you mean by cinder?

HL: Well, I mean it was crushed gravel. It wasn't a paved runway, not a paved runway, okay?

BP: Not solid, okay.

HL: Not solid. And his friend who ran the field evidently saw him coming around and saw him -- he buzzed the field and then came around and dropped his gear and he came in. And he went out and tried to wave him off because he knew that the field was soft, and he didn't think it'd support that aircraft. And evidently Don thought that he was just waving to him, and he landed. And those wheels sunk in and flipped him over on his back and killed him. So two of

those fellows from our squadron were killed shortly after we got back to the States.

BP: Okay. During or even afterward did you communicate with or have any contact with family members of pilots who were lost in the squadron?

HL: I guess I did not. I wrote Don Moore. DB Moore -- that was the name of the pilot I couldn't think of the other day that was shot down when I was...

BP: Oh, first mission?

HL: First mission. His name was DB Moore. I wrote to his parents. But the only other people I wrote to, which I think I told you, when the pilots came back and we were held there, I wrote to all the enlisted personnel's parents.

BP: Right. You also mentioned that warrant engineer officer that you had in the ground crew. Boy, he must have been an older fellow by then.

HL: Oh, he was. Yeah, he was in his 40s, I think.

BP: Yeah, he's from the old school then.

HL: Oh, yes.

BP: The old guard.

HL: Yeah, he was an old-timer.

BP: You ever -- you couldn't think of his name?

HL: I can look it up.

BP: Okay. Do you know any more about that? I mean, like, had he been an infantryman before that?

HL: No, I think he'd been -- well, he was basically an infantryman before he got into aviation. But he'd been a warrant officer in aviation for a long time as a chief mechanic. He came up through the -- but he was trained as an aviation mechanic. And he gradually came up and became a warrant officer.

BP: Okay. Do you remember much more about him than that?

HL: No, I don't. I just remember that he did a great job. And of course, being older, he had all these young kids working for him. And he was like a father to them. So they depended on him for advice and everything.

BP: When you went on R&R to Australia but the ground crew couldn't, did the pilots try to make it up to the ground crew in any way, by bringing them back stuff?

HL: Oh, I think we did. I think we brought them some booze back as far as that's concerned. They would -- the ground crew, they were always dealing with the Seabees. The Seabees seemed to have access to things. And then, they were always -- in fact, we had this one fellow crashed on Munda. We had -- I don't know whether I told you about that. When we were stationed on Munda, they had -- we stood planes at strip alert on either end. In other words,

they were standby in case any enemy aircraft came in, which they did from time to time. There was an alert pad at each end of the runway. And the tower would signal which -- the idea was that if the enemy was coming in from this way that the planes down at this end would take off. If they were coming in from the other direction, it's just maybe a minute or two-time angle there which was real critical. But this one day, the enemy aircraft radar had picked them up there coming in. And the tower signaled the one end to take off, the one alert crew. And the other one somehow got the signal. And they both took off at the same time. And there were two planes. And fortunately they didn't head-on. But they interlocked wings in the center of the darn runway. And of course, both the aircraft were wrecked. The pilots didn't get hurt, but it was a real fiasco. That was on Munda.

BP: Could you add any more about the stragglers you found, the Japanese stragglers? You said one was found in the chow line.

HL: Yeah, in the chow line there. That was the only incident that I remember about them getting down amongst us. We had slept in the tents there, and a lot of people got sick. The food was pretty bad at that time.

BP: You mentioned in the article you ate a lot of Spam.

HL: Oh God, the Spam. I swore I'd never eat that stuff again.

BP: Yeah, I can't stand it. The islanders love it. The GIs brought the Spam in. Man, you go down to the store, and they buy it by the case. The islanders love it. They think it's filet mignon. To this day, it's the meat of choice.

HL: Powdered milk, and those eggs -- I don't know where they got those darned eggs, but they were terrible. Lamb, we had a lot of mutton. That's why a lot of fellows to this day won't eat lamb, because they still taste that mutton that we had.

BP: Anything else? Those were the only questions I had. This will help flesh it out a little bit.

END OF AUDIO FILE